

Ways to Assist Families during Economic Downturn

Purpose:

This instruction sets forth the policy to clarify the effect of year-long duration of eligibility on changes in income that may occur during the school year and to discuss how local educational agencies (LEAs) may assist families who may be experiencing financial hardships.

Scope:

Sponsors participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or the School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Description:

Reporting Changes during the School Year

While households are not required to report changes in circumstances during the school year, a household may contact LEAs to report any changes; a new application is not required. When a change increases the level of benefits (reduced price to free or adding additional members to the household), we encourage LEAs to put the change into effect within three operating days.

Applying during the School Year

Households may apply at any time during the school year, even if an earlier application had been denied. The requirement for year-long duration does not preclude applying or reapplying during the school year. However, households reapplying because they did not complete the verification process are subject to requirements in Part 8, N. (Households that Reapply for Program Benefits) of the January 2008 version of the Eligibility Manual for School Meals (manual).

More Frequent Direct Certification

Because families may become eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Temporary Assistance Needy Families Program at different times, we encourage LEAs to conduct additional direct certification activities to identify newly eligible children. The LEA should also work with the school district's homeless liaison to promptly identify eligible children.

Because families may be moving to new school districts, we would like to remind LEAs that they can share/accept a child's existing eligibility determination. Please see Part 3, O. (Transferring Eligibility between LEAs) of the manual for additional information.

Outreach

We encourage LEAs to inform families about the availability of free and reduced price meal benefits for eligible children and to utilize the procedures described in this memo. Further, we would like to remind LEAs about their ability to complete an application for a child known to be eligible if the household fails to apply. The requirements for this process are discussed in Part 3, J. (Households That Fail to Apply) of the manual.

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